

1. In a messaging system that provides clients with electronic messaging services, a method for distributing an electronic message to each client who is a recipient of the electronic message, comprising the steps of:

creating one or more distribution lists including each client of a host system who is a recipient of the electronic message;

storing at least one copy of the electronic message at the host system;

and

using the one or more distribution lists to notify each client of the host system who is a recipient of the electronic message, such that the at least one copy of the electronic message is made available to each notified client.

2. A method as recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of tracking each client who accesses the at least one stored copy of the electronic message.

3. A method as recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of altering the one or more distribution lists.

4. A method as recited in claim 3 wherein the step of altering the one or more distribution lists comprises the step of removing a recipient, thereby denying the recipient subsequent access to the at least one copy of the electronic message.

5. A method as recited in claim 3 wherein a recipient maintains a local copy of the electronic message and the step of altering the one or more distribution lists comprises the step of removing a recipient, thereby denying the recipient subsequent access to future updates of the electronic message but leaving the local copy intact.

6. A method as recited in claim 3 wherein the step of altering the one or more distribution lists comprises the step of adding a recipient, thereby granting the recipient access to the at least one copy of the electronic message.

7. A method as recited in claim 1 wherein the electronic message comprises rules that govern access to the at least one copy of the electronic message.

8. A method as recited in claim 7, further comprising the step of using the rules to prevent a client who is a recipient from distributing the electronic message to another client who is not a recipient.

9. A method as recited in claim 7, further comprising the step of using the rules to delete the at least one copy of the electronic message at a time designated by the rules.

10. A method as recited in claim 1 wherein a single copy of the electronic message is stored at the host.

11. A method as recited in claim 1 wherein clients are organized into groups and one copy of the electronic message is stored for each group having a client who is a recipient of the electronic message.

12. A method as recited in claim 1 wherein the notification to each recipient comprises the electronic message's subject and a link to access the electronic message.

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13. In a messaging system that includes an originating host system and at least one other host system, each host system providing electronic messaging services to a particular set of clients, a method for distributing an electronic message comprising the steps of:

the originating host system performing the steps of:

creating one or more distribution lists including each recipient of

the electronic message;

identifying each host system providing electronic messaging services for each recipient of the electronic message;

determining whether or not each identified host system is capable of using the one or more distribution lists to notify recipients of at least one copy of an electronic message stored at each identified host system;

grouping each recipient of the electronic message according to the host system providing electronic messaging services in order to form one or more host-specific distribution lists for each identified host system; and

transmitting at least one copy of the electronic message to each identified host system.

14. A method as recited in claim 13 wherein at least one host system performs the steps of:

storing the at least one copy of the electronic message and the corresponding one or more host-specific distribution lists; and

using the one or more host-specific distribution lists to notify each client of the at least one host system who is a recipient of the electronic message, such that the at least one copy of the electronic message is made available to each notified client.

15. A method as recited in claim 13 wherein at least one host system performs the steps of:

storing at least one copy of the electronic message; and

tracking each client who accesses the at least one copy of the electronic message stored at the at least one host system.

16. A method as recited in claim 13, further comprising the step of altering one or more distribution lists.

17. A method as recited in claim 13 wherein the electronic message comprises rules that govern access to the at least one copy of the electronic message.

18. A method as recited in claim 13 wherein at least one host system stores a single copy of the electronic message.

19. A method as recited in claim 13 wherein at least one host's clients are organized into groups and the at least one host stores one copy of the electronic message for each group having a client who is a recipient of the electronic message.

20. A method as recited in claim 13 wherein the originating host system further performs the steps of:

determining that at least one host system is unsupported in that it is not capable of using one or more distribution lists to notify recipients of at least one copy of an electronic message stored at the at least one host system; and

sending the electronic message to the unsupported host system using another electronic messaging protocol compatible with the unsupported host system.

21. In a messaging system that provides clients with electronic messaging services, a method for organizing one or more replies to an electronic message, comprising the steps of:

assigning a unique identifier to the electronic message; and

using the unique identifier to associate the one or more replies with the electronic message.

22. A method as recited in claim 21, further comprising the steps of:

assigning a reply identifier to a first reply created by a recipient of the electronic message; and

using the reply identifier to associate, with the first reply, each of one or more subsequent replies created in response to the first reply.

23. A method as recited in claim 21, further comprising the step of separately presenting the electronic message and the one or more replies to a recipient.

24. A method as recited in claim 22, further comprising the step of separately presenting the electronic message, the first reply and the one or more subsequent replies to a recipient.

25. A method as recited in claim 24 wherein the step of separately presenting the electronic message, the first reply, and the one or more subsequent replies comprises the step of presenting to the recipient a tree arrangement wherein the electronic message is a trunk, the first reply is a first-level branch depending from the trunk, and the one or more subsequent replies are second-level branches depending from the first-level branch.

26. A method as recited in claim 21 wherein the method includes steps for distributing the electronic message to clients of a host system, comprising the steps of:

creating one or more distribution lists including each client of the host system who is a recipient of the electronic message;

storing at least one copy of the electronic message at the host system;
and

using the one or more distribution lists to notify each client of the host system who is a recipient of the electronic message, such that the at least one copy of the electronic message is made available to each notified client.

27. A method as recited in claim 26 wherein the method includes steps for distributing replies to the electronic message, comprising the steps of:

assigning a unique list identifier to the distribution list;

storing at least one copy of a reply created in response to the electronic message; and

notifying each client who is a recipient of the reply using the unique list identifier, such that the at least one copy of the reply is made available to each client who is a recipient of the reply.

28. A method as recited in claim 21, further comprising the steps of:
- assigning a reply identifier to a first reply; and
- using the reply identifier to associate, with the first reply, each of one or more subsequent replies created in response to the first reply.

29. A system for distributing electronic messages in a messaging environment that provides clients with electronic messaging services, the system comprising:

processor means for creating one or more distribution lists that include each client of a host system who is a recipient of the electronic message;

storage means for storing at least one copy of the electronic message at the host system; and

notification means for using the one or more distribution lists to notify each client of the host system who is a recipient of the electronic message, such that the at least one copy of the electronic message is made available to each notified client.

30. A system as recited in claim 29, further comprising means for tracking each client who accesses the at least one stored copy of the electronic message.

31. A system as recited in claim 29, further comprising means for altering the one or more distribution lists.

32. A system as recited in claim 29 wherein the electronic message comprises means for governing access to the at least one copy of the electronic message.

33. A system as recited in claim 29 wherein the storage means stores a single copy of the electronic message.

34. A system as recited in claim 29 wherein the host's clients are organized into groups and the storage means stores one copy of the electronic message for each group having a client who is a recipient of the electronic message.

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35. A system for organizing replies to an electronic message, the system comprising:

processor means for uniquely identifying the electronic message; and

processor means for associating one or more replies with the uniquely identified electronic message.

36. A system recited in claim 35 wherein a recipient of the electronic message can optionally fork a first reply, the system further comprising:

processor means for uniquely identifying the first reply; and

processor means for associating, with the first reply, each of one or more subsequent replies created in response to the first reply.

37. A system as recited in claim 35, the system further comprising means for separately presenting the electronic message and the one or more replies to a recipient.

38. A system as recited in claim 36, the system further comprising means for separately presenting to a recipient the electronic message, the first reply and the one or more subsequent replies.

39. A system as recited in claim 35 wherein the system includes a host system and means for distributing the electronic message, the system further comprising:

processor means for creating one or more distribution lists including each client of the host system who is a recipient of the electronic message;

storage means for storing at least one copy of the electronic message at the host system; and

notification means for using the one or more distribution lists to notify each client of the host system who is a recipient of the electronic message, such that the at least one copy of the electronic message is made available to each notified client.

40. A system as recited in claim 39 wherein the system includes means for distributing replies to an electronic message, comprising:

processor means for assigning a unique list identifier to the distribution list;

storage means for storing a single copy of a reply created in response to the electronic message; and

notification means for notifying each client who is a recipient of the reply using the unique list identifier, such that the single copy of the reply is made available to each notified client.

41. A system as recited in claim 40 wherein the system includes means for a recipient of the electronic message to optionally fork a first reply, comprising:

processor means for assigning a reply identifier to the first reply; and

processor means for using the unique identifier to associate, with the first reply, each of one or more subsequent replies created in response to the first reply.

42. A computer program product for implementing a method for distributing an electronic message wherein the method is capable of being implemented in a messaging system that includes a host system and provides clients with electronic messaging services, the computer program product comprising:

a computer-readable medium carrying computer-executable instructions for implementing the method wherein the computer-executable instructions comprise:

program code means for creating one or more distribution lists including each client of the host system who is a recipient of the electronic message;

program code means for storing at least one copy of the electronic message at the host system; and

program code means for using the one or more distribution lists to notify each client of the host system who is a recipient of the electronic message, such that the at least one copy of the electronic message is made available to each notified client.

43. A computer program product as recited in claim 42 wherein the computer-executable instructions further comprise program code means for altering the one or more distribution lists.

44. A computer program product as recited in claim 42 wherein the computer-executable instructions further comprise program code means for processing rules governing access to the at least one stored copy of the electronic message.

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45. A computer program product for implementing a method for organizing replies to an electronic message wherein the method is capable of being implemented in a messaging system that includes a host system and provides clients with electronic messaging services, the computer program product comprising:

a computer-readable medium carrying computer-executable instructions for implementing the method wherein the computer-executable instructions comprise:

program code means for assigning a unique identifier to the electronic message; and
program code means for using the unique identifier to associate one or more replies with the electronic message.

46. A computer program product as recited in claim 45 wherein the computer-executable instructions further comprise program code means for distributing the electronic message, comprising:

program code means for creating one or more distribution lists including each client of the host system who is a recipient of the electronic message;

program code means for storing at least one copy of the electronic message at the host system; and

program code means for using the one or more distribution lists to notify each client of the host system who is a recipient of the electronic message, such that the at least one copy of the electronic message is made available to each notified client.

47. A computer program product as recited in claim 45 wherein the computer-executable instructions further comprise program code means for distributing one or more replies the electronic message, comprising:

program code means for assigning a unique list identifier to the distribution list;

program code means for storing at least one copy of a reply created in response to the electronic message; and

program code means for notifying each client who is a recipient of the reply using the unique list identifier, such that the at least one copy of the reply is made available to each client who is a recipient of the reply.